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**Testimony of Chief Kelly Stillman**  
*Cleveland Metroparks Police Department*  
Ohio House Pensions Committee  
**September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

Chairman Matthews, Vice Chair King, Ranking Member Lightbody, and members of the House Pensions Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of House Bill 94. My name is Kelly Stillman and I am the Chief of The Cleveland Metroparks Police Department. I want to thank the bill sponsors, Representatives Willis and Click, for introducing this legislation and I want to express my gratitude to the committee for holding this hearing.

This legislation will create parity amongst law enforcement agencies in the ability to hire officers with prior experience. In addition, this legislation will remove a barrier for law enforcement officers seeking transfer or promotional opportunities at OPERS law enforcement agencies.

Pursuant to Revised Code Section 1545, Cleveland Metroparks employs over 80 OPOTA-certified law enforcement officers who exercise full police powers in the commission of their duties. Under Revised Code Section 145.01, our law enforcement officers are members of the Ohio Public Employee Retirement System (“OPERS”) as opposed to the Ohio Police and Fire Retirement System (“OPF”). Membership in OPERS is compulsory upon being employed and park district police officers contribute 13% of their earnable salary to OPERS and Cleveland Metroparks contributes 18.1%. In addition to park district police officers, law enforcement officers at sheriff departments, townships, state universities, and regional transit authorities (amongst others) are members of OPERS.

The current statutes relating to transfer of law enforcement service credit between OPF and OPERS create an inherent disadvantage for OPERS law enforcement agencies in recruiting and hiring officers with experience at OPF agencies. In addition, the pension transfer rules hinder OPF officers from pursuing transfer and promotional opportunities at OPERS agencies.

While OPERS does accept transfer of OPF service credit, OPERS will only accept such service if the officer works more time in an OPERS position than they previously did at the OPF agency. The OPF statutes do not contain a similar “majority of service” requirement. Rather, an employee transferring from an OPERS to OPF agency can immediately transfer their OPERS service time to OPF under Revised Code Section 742.21.

Cleveland Metroparks has experienced difficulty due to this disparate situation in recruiting senior leadership for our police department. During our recruiting process, we would consider multiple qualified and interested OPF officers for open positions, including as Chief of Police. Such officers, however, were often unwilling to consider the position because it would require them to work a considerably longer time to retire under the OPERS transfer statute. For example, an OPF officer with 18 years of experience would need to work an additional 18+ years in OPERS to facilitate transfer of the OPF service credit. That same employee would be eligible to retire within 7 years if they remain in an OPF agency.

H. B. 611 will eliminate the “majority of service” requirement for transfer to an OPERS law enforcement agency, which will create parity amongst law enforcement agencies and create new career opportunities for experienced officers. Cleveland Metroparks fully supports enactment of this important legislation.